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# ***Subculture, ethnicity and the politics of (post)modernity.***

**Paper for Scandinavian Youth and Marginalization Network meeting  
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**Second Version**

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## **Introduction**

Contemporary academic debates about youth subculture often claim that we live in a time where the cultural articulations of young people are depoliticized – if indeed there was ever a moment when there was a political content. Therefore, it is argued, youth subcultures should be understood as arenas of expressions of individuality rather than as articulations which may contain implicit or explicit social criticism. Simultaneously structural forms of inequality are sometimes regarded as having relatively little relevance to the study of youth subcultures, discarding by implication the notion that youth subcultures may sometimes be understood as creative collective ‘answers’ to a shared social situation. Both claims are sometimes framed within an understanding of contemporary society as post-modern.

Yet it seems that these claims are not quite fitting some of the most obvious and visible contemporary youth Subcultures, for instance those revolving around the musical genres hip hop and rap and in particular young ethnic minority men’s involvement herein.

The aim of this article is therefore to assess and critically discuss the claims that contemporary youth subcultures are depoliticized and that the relevance of structural forms of inequality has lessened for understanding contemporary youth subculture. This discussion is carried out through an analysis of musical material from a number of contemporary Danish hip hop groups with ethnic minority members.

## **Some theoretical starting points**

### *Academic debates about subcultures*

Studies and theories of subculture have a long history in sociology, criminology and youth studies. The first wave of subcultural theory can be tracked back to the Chicago School which had a particular interest in life in the city as well as in criminology. Blackman (2005) informs us that the first known use of the concept is in a publication by Chicago School author Viven Marie Palmer in 1928. In the aftermath of the Chicago School the concept became central to American criminology in the late 50’s and 60’s. A central work was Albert K. Cohen’s classic work on *Delinquent Boys* (1955). Later commentators has suggested that in *Delinquents Boys* Cohen outlined the first proper subcultural theory (Bay & Drotner 1986). In the book Cohen suggested that subcultures could be understood as a cultural solution to a shared problem among working class boys. These boys suffered from low status because of the class position, but the subculture could provide them with

status based on alternative criteria (Cohen, 1955). This also meant that the subculture could not be reduced to a deficit or a lack of proper norms. On the contrary the subculture has meaning and a function for those who participate (Young 19xx). Other important contributions from this period included Miller (1958), Cloward & Ohlin (1960) and Matza (1964) in the US and Mays (1967) and Downes (1966) in Britain.

The second wave of subcultural theory was coined at the University of Birmingham in the 1970s by the Center of Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS). Central works in this tradition are Dick Hebdige's *Subculture - The meaning of style* (1979), Paul Willis' *Learning to labour* (1978), as well as the edited volume *Resistance through rituals* (Hall & Jefferson 1991 [1975]). Other important contributions are Cohen (2002 [1972]), Cohen (1972) and Mungham & Pearson (1978) (for overviews see Brake 1985, Gudmundsson 1992, Muggleton 2005). The CCCS produced a theoretical understanding of subcultures based on a Marxist conception of British post war capitalist society. They understood the subcultures of working class youth as creative cultural 'answers' – or attempts at solutions - to problems that were specific to both generation and class position and at the same time as forms of resistance against social dominance. As Christine E. Griffin has pointed out the CCCS focused on power, class and politics but were quite unorthodox in their understanding of the political which contemporary Marxist scholars tended to locate in 'traditional forms of union activism' and *not* in the youth cultural sphere (2011: 246).

The idea that subcultures could be understood as attempts at a solution or as creative cultural answers to a shared situation did however not necessarily imply an optimistic prognosis for such solutions. As the authors explain in the theoretical introduction to *Resistance to Rituals*:

*'But their highly ritualised and stylised form suggest that they were also attempts at a solution to that problematic experience: a resolution which, because pitched largely at the symbolic level, was fated to fail. The problematic of a subordinate class experience can be 'lived through', negotiated or resisted; but it cannot be resolved at that level or by those means.'*

Hall & Jefferson 1975, pp.47, emphasis added

This however does not mean that CCCS ruled out that subcultures can win space for their participants. As Brake points out they were seen to offer some kind of 'magical' solution to structural problems, win space for young people, offer meaningful leisure activities and offer a viable identity on the individual as well the collective level (1985:24).

In addition to, and somewhat intertwined with, the political dimension another important contribution of the CCCS was the addition of a semiotic dimension to subcultural theory. Thus the CCCS devoted analytical attention to the analysis of style. This included focus on the ways subcultures appropriated already existing symbols and gave them new meaning, through processes which the CCCS conceptualized as bricolage. Taken as whole the CCCS continued to understand the concept of subculture as a meeting point between the cultural and the social - an understanding already present in the first wave of subcultural theory - but added conflict, politics and semiotics.

The theoretical work of the CCCS has been criticized from numerous positions: Feminist scholars who were themselves a part of the CCCS argued that the theoretical work was biased in terms of privileging the experiences and subcultures of young men (McRobbie og Garber 1975, McRobbie 1980, 1990), and argued that the CCCS did not offer enough attention to misogyny, homophobia and problematic masculinism in the studied subcultures (see also Brake 1985, Johansson, Sernhede & Trondmann 1999: 15, 19, Frosh, Phoenix og Pattman 2002: 53). The CCCS theorists were also criticized for an inadequate theoretization of race and ethnicity, and for legitimating racism among white working class youth (Gilroy 1993, Frosh, Phoenix og Pattman 2002, Carrington & Wilson 2004). In Scandinavia Erling Bjurström has criticized the CCCS for neglecting to grasp how the form of resistance of the working class is intertwined in 'complex chains' of resistance and dominance which can only be comprehended through a sensitive analyses of the relation between class, gender, ethnicity and 'race' (1997: 108).

The end of the 1990 saw the rise of a third wave subcultural theory which I will here call Post-Subcultural Studies (Cohen 1987, Thornton 1995, Muggleton 2000, Bennett 2000, Muggleton & Weinzierl 2002, Bennett & Kahn-Harris 2004). This broad group of scholars was to some extent inspired by the criticism of the CCCS discussed above. Consequently post-subcultural theory raised a number of critical questions about the work of CCCS. Of central relevance to the questions discussed in this paper was the skepticism towards the emphasis on (class) dominance and resistance in the CCCS work as well as the skepticism towards the political interpretations of youth subcultures inherent in the CCCS. This scepticism was often grounded in theories about late- or postmodernity.

The historical starting point of the Post-Subcultural Studies scholarship cannot be defined definitely, but here her I will use Stanley Cohen's 1987 foreword to the CCCS classic *Folk Devils*

*and Moral Panics* as a starting point<sup>1</sup>. Herein Cohen pointed out that CCCS tended to see youth subcultures as a 'political battleground between classes' (1987: xlix). He argued that the political interpretation were tied too closely to a 'forced' semiotic analysis with the result that '*the symbolic baggage the kids are being asked to carry is just too heavy*' (Cohen 2002[1987]: lix). He furthermore argued that the resistance may have existed primarily in the imagination of the CCCS scholars and that their perspective was sometimes close to romanticism (ibid. lxviii).

A later representative of this scholarship is David Muggleton. Muggleton has argued that today it can be necessary to ask '*who exactly is doing the resisting*' (2000: 30). He furthermore argues that contemporary society is post-modern and that »*the break down of mass society has ensured that there is no longer a coherent dominant culture against which a subculture can express its resistance*« (2000:48). He argues that subcultures are not group solutions to collective problems related to class position and that the relation between structural position and cultural practice was never adequately demonstrated by the CCCS, who simply projected their own political and theoretical ideas into the minds of the subjects they studied (Muggleton 2000: 167). Furthermore Muggleton pointed out that rather than resisting majority culture, subcultures often radicalize tendencies of main stream society (2000)<sup>2</sup>.

Generally the Post-Subcultural Studies scholars have argued that the CCCS theorists were too involved in a marxist political project, which led them to narrow their theoretical focus primarily to class, to romanticize the youth subcultures and to see the young people who participated in the subcultures as the vanguard of the revolution (Cohen 2002[1987]: lxviii, Muggleton 2000), even if the solution was often seen as a part of the problem rather than as a real solution (Cohen 2002[1987]). More specifically a number of authors has criticized the CCCS for overestimating the explanatory value of class (Cohen 2002[1987]) and argued that this tends towards class determinism (Muggleton 2000, Muggleton & Weinzierl 2002, Bennett og Kahn- Harris 2004). Consequently it is sometimes argued that class is not necessarily relevant to the study of subcultures.

Parallel to this criticism Post-Subcultural Studies offers a number of substantial theoretical alternatives to CCCS's understanding of subcultures. According to the Post-Subcultural Studies

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<sup>1</sup> Note that Stanley Cohen was both part of the CCCS *and* part of a new line of Criticism towards the CCCS

<sup>2</sup> Muggleton argues that the anarchism of punk can be understood as a radicalisation of liberal individualism. Similarly it could be argued that the hip hop culture central to the arguments in this paper sometimes radicalizes consumerism and masculine dominance both central traits of contemporary main stream society.

scholars subcultures today must be understood in the light of post modernity or late modernity. Young people today live their lives under social conditions of fluidity which, it is claimed, cannot be grasped by the conceptions of the CCCS. Alternatively the Post-Subcultural Studies scholars argue for the possibility of seeing subcultures as fluid, fragmented and multifaceted. There is today, it is argued, a possibility that individuals can slide in and out of a series of subcultures or participate in several subcultures simultaneously (Muggleton 2000, Muggleton & Weinzierl 2002). Muggleton therefore ties subcultures to identity construction, and interprets subcultures as self chosen manifestations of individual autonomy and expression in a post-modern world, rather than collective or resistant collective answers to shared problems (2000: 167). Similarly Andy Bennett has suggested that the concept of subculture could be rethought in conjunction with Michel Maffesoli (1996) concept of tribalism (Bennett 1999, 2000). This means that subcultures are conceived as neotribes – at type of relatively loosely defined collectivities, which individuals can choose to participate in for a period of time.

The criticism of the CCCS theory carried out by the Post-Subcultural Studies and the turn towards post-modernity, late modernity and fluidity as an overall frame of theoretical reference did not go unnoticed. On the contrary a criticism of the criticism of CCCS soon emerged, forming what I would call an embryonal start of a formulation of a neo-birminghamian understanding of subculture. This could possibly be a start of a fourth wave of subcultural theory although this remains yet to be seen. If we understand the theoretical contribution of CCCS theory, and the earlier tradition, as preoccupied with subculture as a meeting point between culture and structure then the criticism of Post-Subcultural Studies has generally been that these authors decoupled the structural from their understanding of contemporary youth culture. Hence Carrington & Wilson criticized the postmodern understanding of the Post-Subcultural Studies scholars for decoupling conceptions of power and structural inequality from the analysis, and raised serious criticism of de-politization of subculture (2004).

As I will return to below I consider hip hop and rap an illustrative example of the problems related to a wholesale de-politization of subculture. Even if the politics involved in rap are by no means unproblematic and even if they do not take the form of traditional politics, but are often articulated as a form of streetpolitics (both aspects I will return to below), rap and hip hop exemplifies that it is somewhat problematic to argue that contemporary youth subcultures are apolitical.

Other authors such as Blackman (2005) og Hesmondhalgh (2005) have argued against the voluntaristic and individualistic understanding which they considered to be central to Bennett's

application of the conception of neotribalism to subcultural theory. Blackman even argued that this way of thinking about subcultures comes dangerously close to neo-liberalism (2005, see also Jensen 2006a). In a somewhat overlapping argument several authors have argued for the continued relevance of structural categories to the study of your subculture, since young people and their cultures are framed within and to some extent conditioned by social divisions and inequalities – for instance it is not all young people who have the possibility of engaging in the consumerism central to some subcultures (Shildrick 2006, also Jensen 2006b). Some authors have pointed to the continued relevance of class (Shildrick 2006, Shildrick og MacDonald 2006). Other authors have pointed to the relevance of ethnicity and race. Carrington & Wilson for instance argue that '*many contemporary accounts of subcultural theory*' lack attention to '*racial formation, ethnic identity construction and the articulation of racism within and between subcultures*'. (2004: 71). As I will return to below foci on race, class, ethnicity and gender are not necessarily mutually exclusive. On the contrary these social categories can be thought of as mutually constitutive both on an identity level and on a structural level which determines people's social conditions of life. Hence there are differences between the subcultures or tastecultures of relatively privileged young people and the subcultures produced by the socially and economically underprivileged young people who are the focus of the analysis below. These differences are related to the intersection between class, ethnicity and 'race' although not determined by it. In other words Shildrick & MacDonald has a strong argument when they maintain that the Post-Subcultural Studies scholars have focused their attention towards tastecultures of privileged youth, and therefore have no basis for assessing whether structural inequality plays a role for other contemporary youth subcultures (2006).

### *Subculture, postmodernity and hip hop*

As has already been touched upon above the discussions in this paper taps into an overall debate about subculture, postmodernity and hip hop. As mentioned David Muggleton's influential contribution argues that contemporary subcultures should be understood in the light of postmodernity. However Muggleton empirical analysis of young subculturalists in Britain leads him to a complex conclusion. *On the one* hand contemporary subcultures are inscribed in the postmodern. They exist in a social world which is fluid, constantly changing and where cultural forms are not fixed. This is experienced as a world where many choices are possible, where simultaneous participation in several subcultures is possible, where boundaries between different subcultures blur and where shifts in participation are unproblematic. *On the other* hand Muggleton's interviewees do



not have a decentered or anti-essentialist understanding of (their own) identity. On the contrary they conceive of their participation in subcultures as an expression of their true selves – and thereby articulate a modern, essentialist and authenticist understand of identity (Muggleton 2000).

There are, as Muggletons analysis suggests, different dimensions of post-modernity, and also different assessments of whether and in what sense hip hop is a post-modern cultural phenomenon. On a somewhat abstract level it is possible to argue that most black diasporic cultures are post-modern because of their successive *reworking, recombination and redefinition of the cultural*. Hence according to Tony Sewell black bricolage cultures provide empirical examples of ‘a post modern exercise’, which is otherwise often discussed in purely abstract terms (Sewell 1996, 144). Since all cultures in principle entail bricolage and hybridity (Hall 1991, 1992) I would add that the postmodernity of hip hop as a black diasporic culture lies in its *constant* transformation and *accelerated* hybridity. As Walcott argues the ‘*continuous practices of parody, deferral, bricolage, pastiche, collage, indirection, reversal, and numerous other “postmodern” practices*’ (103) as well as the concrete practice of sampling disrupts the idea of authenticity and originality inherent in a modern understanding of music (1999)<sup>3</sup>. It is also possible to argue that the *orientation towards style and surface* in hip hop is a postmodern trait. In relation to these dimensions all hip hop, and indeed all the hip hop groups analyzed in this article, is postmodern. However as touched upon above postmodernity is often also associated with anti essentialism and the decentering of identity and on this dimension Birgitte Stougaard Pedersen has argued that hip hop is ambiguous: Hip hop more often than not crosses the divide between modernity and postmodernity because although hip hop is postmodern in form (bricolage, hybridity, sampling), it is quite often modern in its understanding of the subject and it’s insistence of authenticity (Pedersen 2008: 183). As Cecilia Cutler has emphasized ‘keeping it real’ is a central value in hip hop culture which implies ‘*the idea that people should not present them selves for what they are not*’ (2003: 5)<sup>4</sup>. In short although hip hop is sometimes discussed as a postmodern cultural phenomenon it often contains an essentialist celebration of the stabile authentic subjects!<sup>5</sup> As we will see in the analysis below there is considerable variation on this dimension in the hip hop groups I address here. In fact only one of the

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<sup>3</sup> See also Mads Krogh’s Ph.D. dissertation which documents that hip hop artists are often criticized for lacking authenticity by main stream music reviewers (2006).

<sup>4</sup> According to Cutler another dimension of ‘keeping it real’ is some level of connectedness to street life (2003).

<sup>5</sup> There are rare exceptions. For instance the rapper Kool Keith has various pseudonyms, such as Rhythm X, Dr. Octagon, Dr. Doom, Black Elvis. Keith Korg etc.

groups analyzed here are involved in a form of identity play that can meaningfully be described as postmodern decentering of identity.

### *Resistance*

The analysis carried out in this paper also calls for a discussion of the concept of resistance. Here a delicate balance must be kept: On the one hand the Post-Subcultural Studies scholars and other contemporary observers are in my view right to argue that the CCCS work entailed a problematic tendency to construct youth subcultures as ‘formations of political vanguards’ (Griffin 2011: 252). Following Kenneth Baxter & Peter Marina (2008), and the points from Cohen 2002[1987] referred to above, it can furthermore be argued that purely semiotic analysis carries with it a tendency to overstate resistance. On the other hand one must, as Raby has argued, avoid a too narrow understanding of resistance since children and young people often resist less from explicit and conscious motives and more from an only partially conscious feeling of injustice (2005). In this article I balance these arguments by arguing that subcultural articulations can be classified as oppositional political practices to the extent that they either explicitly comment upon and criticize underprivileged social conditions of life *or* document these social circumstances in the visual material accompanying them *or* in musical form can be said to disrupt notions of normality, consensus and order (which is not always the case for hip hop<sup>6</sup>). In other words I consider a criterion of explicit verbal critique too narrow, as it in some sense does not take music serious as sound, i.e. reduces it to its textual content. It should be noted that the notion of resistance is by definition reactive as resistance is always resistance towards something which is there *before* the resistance. Emphasis on resistance is therefore something different from emphasis on cultural innovations which may *transcend* the pre-given logics of the social. A wider discussion of this theme falls outside the limits of this version of the paper.

### **Subcultural and national context**

The hip hop groups analyzed in this paper are tightly related to a larger subcultural milieu. Hence the analyses put forward are grounded in a broader field of studies of ethnic minority (male) youth’s engagement with hip hop in Scandinavia. Despite variations in methodology and national context a number of Scandinavian studies have identified what I would define as a distinct subculture of more

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<sup>6</sup> Some hip hop can be characterized as smooth, cool, funky and groovy rather than dissonant and noisy.

or less marginalized ethnic minority men who live in the suburbs of the larger cities (Jensen 2007, Andersen et. al. 2001, Sernhede 2001a, 2002, 2007, Sandberg & Pedersen 2006, Sandberg 2008, Hviid 2007, Jonsson 2007, Hammarén 2008, Klinker & Bilde 2009). The music analyzed in this paper is tightly related to this subculture. Several studies (Jensen 2007, 2005, Sernhede 2002, Sandberg 2008) document that this subculture draws heavily on elements of hip hop, although the subculture is not synonymous with hip hop culture in a narrow sense.

Different analyses understand the relation to hip hop somewhat differently, but in broad terms the research suggests that although elements of hip hop are today part of main stream youth culture and are often adopted by white ethnic majority youth there are specific dimensions in the way (male) ethnic minority youth relate to hip hop: 1) Hip hop can be a way to ascribe value to ethnic/racial minority status. These young men often use hip hop to construct a style which allows bodily signs of otherness to be imbued with value. Hip hop then allows young marginalized ethnic minority young men to capitalize on being positioned at the ethnic/racial other and to stage themselves as attractive, masculine, 'dangerous' and sexy (Jensen 2007, 2008, 2010a, 2011, Sandberg & Pedersen 2006, Sandberg 2008); 2) the engagement with hip hop can sometimes be based on a more or less conscious identification with the marginal black milieus in the urban USA (Prieur 1999, Mørck 1999, Sernhede 1999, 2001a, 2001b, 2002, Jensen 2008, Jensen & Hviid 2003, Sandberg & Pedersen 2006, Sandberg 2008); 3) As the analysis below confirm hip hop offers a voice and a repertoire to reflect and comment upon ones own marginality and ascribed otherness (Sernhede 2002, Jensen 2007).

Although not all young men in this broader subculture produce hip hop music the music analyzed in this paper is tied to this relative large subculture. Without downplaying the importance of individual artist or denying variation I understand the musical material analysed here as public manifestations of a broader subculture – and I consider it valid to see the social criticism articulated in the music as indicative for issues central to this subculture. I find the musical material produced by these groups particularly useful for the assessment of the claims put forward of Post-Subcultural theory, although this choice also needs to be taken into account when considering the scope of the empirical conclusions.

The broad subculture as well as the musical material analyzed here should in my view also be understood in relation to a larger national social context. Although hip hop is diasporic and transnational (Walcott 1999, McLaren 1999, Sernhede 2001b, 2002) the specific national context is

central to understanding the analysis in this paper. It is well documented that Danish public discourses have for quite a long time problematized the presence of visibly different ethnic minorities<sup>7</sup> in Denmark (Horst 1991, Schierup 1993, Diken 1998, Yilmaz 1999, Røgilds 1994, 2002, Hervik 1999, 2004, Andreassen 2005). Commentators have characterized Danish discourses about “immigrants” as an example of ‘new racism’ based on a logic of cultural difference (Schierup 1993). Karen Wren has argued that cultural racism, has found fertile ground in Denmark, resulting in a widespread popular discourse constructing especially Muslims as not belonging (2001). Somewhat overlapping Peter Hervik has described the popular discourses of many Danes as a ‘Cultural World of Unbridgeable Differences’ in which the assumed culture of so-called ‘foreigners’ is constructed as radically different from and inferior to Danish culture (2004). Rikke Andreassen (2005) has analysed Danish media coverage of visibly different ethnic minorities as preoccupied with crime, oppression of women, aggression and an assumed lack of integration. Some of these discourses specifically address young “immigrant” men; especially marginalized young “immigrant” men who mass media construct as a burden or a threat to society. In the words of Andreassen they are often described as criminal and ‘*as members of gangs, as irredeemable, and as inhabitants of lawless areas*’ (2005, 122). Such discourses influence life of young men with visible ethnic minority background living in Denmark (Jensen 2007, 2010a) and therefore constitute a common problem which the subculture should be understood against. It should however be emphasized that the shared situation of these young men cannot be reduced to the consequences of ethno-racial marginality. On the contrary it is important to maintain that they are marginalized both in terms of class and in terms of race/ethnicity. However, as I will return to below, class does not seem to offer quite the same repertoire of symbols and meanings as race.

## Material and method

The empirical material analysed in this article consists of musical material from several hip hop groups and individual artists in Denmark, with either ethnic minority background or multiethnic background<sup>8</sup>. The definition of hip hop employed is broad. I consider the blurring of genres a postmodern trait inherent to hip hop itself, regardless of the continuous policing of what is and is not hip hop among many hip hoppers. The groups are: Pimp-A-Lot, P4L (Perker4life), B.O.C. (Bombs over Copenhagen), Marwan, Zaki, Outlandish, Artif Khawaja, Ali Kazim, Albertslund

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<sup>7</sup> I use the term visibly different ethnic minorities to denote that racial markers like pigmentation or hair colour plays an implicit role in these discourses.

<sup>8</sup> Two of the Groups analyzed include Danish members (B.O.C. and Pimp-A-Lot).

Terror Korps and Kid Kishore. Visual material accompanying the music is included (CD covers as well as videos uploaded by the artists on various internet sites). This is supplemented with different internet sources (for instance *myspace* have been used to track relations between groups). As a secondary source I draw upon my earlier ethnographic research related to my Pd.D. project. This project focused on the subculture produced by marginalized ethnic minority men in reaction to othering (Jensen 2007). The methods employed here included field work, interviews, magazines and internet material (see Jensen 2007 or 2010a for details). Finally I should mention that, as a third source, the analyses are informed by my own participation in hip hop which includes attending concerts with some of the artist addressed in the paper<sup>9</sup>. It should be noted that some of the groups analyzed here have no relation to the organized music industry and operate outside the market as they have yet to officially release a song. All citations from the rap texts below are translated from Danish to English by me<sup>10</sup>.

## **Empirical Analysis**

The empirical analysis below focuses on a number of Danish hip hop groups/single artists with multiethnic or ethnic minority background. The analysis takes a tentative typology as its starting point. This typology clusters the different rap acts in terms style.

The analysis emphasises two dimensions: 1) the ways identity is articulated in the text, 2) whether, to what extent and in which form political resistance is articulated.

### *'Dangerous' young ethnic minority men as street politicians*

The groups in this cluster (Pimp-A-Lot (including early Marwan), P4L & B.O.C.), articulate a hard and explicit form of hip hop. In that sense the groups can be said to both reflect and stage marginality. Two of the groups in this cluster refer for themselves or are commonly referred to as 'Perkerrap' – a subgenre of 'Danish' hip hop which accentuates the ethnic minority background, as

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<sup>9</sup> As Muggleton has argued having participated in the subcultures one studies works as a safeguard against projecting theories onto subcultures which have little to say about how subcultural life is actually lived (2000: 2 ff., for a discussion see Shildrick & MacDonald 2006, 128 ff.). I agree although the theoretical implication for me has been the opposite of Muggleton's: My personal participation in hip hop has made me quite sceptical of theoretical depolitization of contemporary youth culture.

<sup>10</sup> A note on method: the following analysis argues and exemplifies its points primarily by citing the texts of the groups analyzed. I am aware of the dangers involved in reducing music to text. On the other hand text *is* central to hip hop. I have therefore attempted to find a balance and include the sound of the music where I find it important.

‘perker’ is a strongly derogatory Danish term for immigrant from North Africa or the Middle East. This genre is known for its explicit contents as well for routine use of heavy accent and alternative grammar.

Pimp-A-Lot which is a loosely defined musical collective emerged from the creative milieu of the underprivileged urban area Århus Vest. The group's name is a reference to American rap label Rap-A-Lot which is known for distributing such groups as Ghetto Boys and Scarface; gangsta rappers famous for their somewhat ghetto-centric explicit lyrics, depicting guns, violence, drugs, sex and sometimes misogyny. The same is to some extent true for Pimp-A-Lot as their lyrical universe has some of these characteristics. However, the lyrics are at the same time, sometimes even within the same song, articulations of social criticism. In an interview in the Danish hip hop internet site, rapper and producer Abu-Malek (also interviewed in Jensen 2007) characterizes the music as *street politics* and explains:

*You know, life isn't pink flowers. No matter where you are. Maybe for those who live in Risskov<sup>11</sup> and by the beach, and then they can talk about that. But when we represent the shit down here ... then we need to rap about the truth. The reason I make music like that is that I want it to get into the brains of people. And gangster rap gets into your soul. And that is the purpose. 'StreetPolitics', that is also the name of our next record. So political, sure – in the streets [...] As I have said before, a guy like Anders Fjog<sup>12</sup>, right? They come and they talk [...] and he is on TV. It is the same with us – we are just on the street [...] telling it to you through music. So politics, maybe not so much about countries and stuff like that, but street politics – 100 percent.*

(Passage from the interview ‘Under Masken på 8210’ [www.hiphop.dk](http://www.hiphop.dk))

In the passage Abu-Malek explains that he considers the music political. According to Abu-Malek gangsterrap is chosen as genre because of its ability to get through to people. A broad definition of the political is employed in the sense that he distances himself from institutional politics.

One of the central artists in Pimp-A-Lot is SLP/Marwan. SLP - the name used in the earlier material - is an acronym for StateLess Palestinian (in Danish: StatsLøs Palæstinenser) implying that the very choice of pseudonym may entail social criticism<sup>13</sup>. Marwan has released two CDs in his own name,

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<sup>11</sup> Risskov is a relatively privileged neighbourhood in Århus.

<sup>12</sup> Nickname for the Danish Prime Minister at the time of the interview, Anders Fogh. ‘Fjog’ is Danish for fool.

<sup>13</sup> Marwan's parents are Palestinian refugees.

besides appearances on various Pimp-A-Lot material. The first CD is entitled P.E.R.K.E.R. Several songs on the CD are worth mentioning here. One song is *selvgjort, velgjort*. The title is difficult to translate but refers to a Danish saying that implies that if you do things yourself you are sure they are done properly. In the chorus line of the song Marwan raps

*“Vote for the red,  
Smoke the green,  
Sell the white,  
Work black<sup>14</sup>, selvgjort velgjort”*

What appears at first glance as a street smart description of marginal life on the street is political in two ways: Manifestly as Marwan positions himself as left wing (vote for the red) and latently in the references to ethnicity and the Palestinian Diaspora: red, green, white and black are the colours of the Palestinians flag.

Another song worth mentioning is ‘A stone in his hand’ (Danish: ‘En sten I hans hånd’). The song explicitly comments on the Palestinian diaspora from the standpoint of the intifada, and is to be found in two versions on the CD. In one of the versions some of the rap is in Arabian.

A third song worth mentioning for its visual material is ‘no hope’ (Danish: intet håb). The semi-documentary video of the song – which shows among other things a person being stabbed and a young man overdosing from heroin abuse – visualizes the differences between rich and poor and entail a strong social criticism of the social circumstances of life in the underprivileged suburbs. The bleakness of the video is underpinned by melancholy of the piano sample central to the music Marwan raps over. At the same time there is also a dimension of documenting a relation to street life in the video. This reference to street life can be understood as a way of ‘keeping it real’ (Cutler 2003).

The cover of the CD also deserves mentioning here. On the front cover Marwan’s is pictured in the same way as a criminal in a crime register – this genre of pictures is known from other rap covers and should probably here be understood primarily as a reference to the Houston based rap group Geto Boys<sup>15</sup>. On the inner cover another picture depicts Marwan looking out the window in a pose which obviously paraphrases Malcolm X in the well known ‘By any means necessary’ photograph.

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<sup>14</sup> In everyday Danish black work refers to tax evasion.

<sup>15</sup> In an interview for my PhD. project Pimp-A-Lots producer Abu-Malek, who is the older brother of Marwan, explains that he is a fan of the Geto Boys.

This may also, at the same time, be a reference to KRS-one's pose on the cover of the classic rap album 'by all means nescenary' (Jive Records 1988). The intertextual references to Malcolm X on the one hand and Geto Boys on the other shows is illustrative of the double articulation of a 'gangsta' position on the one hand and a political anti-racist position on the other.

Another central group of the Perker Rap sub genre is P4L, an acronym for Perker for Life<sup>16</sup>. In a song entitled 'I fear only Allah' ('Frygter kun Allah'), the P4L member Turco raps:

*Of course we get stopped by some pigs*

*Wholla, I'm telling you they are a fucked up joke*

*They ask us where we have been, what the fuck we have been doing, which potatoes<sup>17</sup> we have smashed*

*Only because of BT and Ekstrabladet<sup>18</sup>*

*The Danish media are some fucking racists,*

*The same is true for your ugly minister*

*[...]*

*You are only after some fucking perkere*

*Turks, Arabs, Pakistanis and Serbs*

The text criticizes police harassment and racist media discourses. However in somewhat the same way as Marwan it does so from a position of the hard, dangerous masculine young ethnic minority man.

The last group I will address in this Cluster is *B.O.C.*, an acronym for Bombs over Copenhagen. Contrary to Pimp-A-Lot and P4L *B.O.C.* is not referred to as perkerrap but is considered to belong to the hip hop subgenre 'grime'. *B.O.C.* is not as street-political on the textual level as Pimp-A-Lot and P4L, however I would argue that their music and the visual material accompanying it contains a dimension of social criticism. One example is the song *still the best* (in Danish: stadig den bedste)<sup>19</sup>. The video accompanying the song documents the harsh reality of the concrete blocks of the underprivileged suburbs where *B.O.C.* lives. It thus visualises the differences between rich and

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<sup>16</sup> P4L/Perker for life is itself an intertextual reference to the Los Angeles-based rap group NWA (Niggaz With Attitude) which had a commercial succes with the album *Niggaz For Life* (Ruthless Records, 1991).

<sup>17</sup> Potato is slang for ethnic Dane

<sup>18</sup> Danish tabloids.

<sup>19</sup> <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O8b4pw4l-fE>, found 2/6 2011



poor. At the same time the very sound of the music is important. Grime is a subgenre of hip hop developed in the UK. In a certain sense Grime is oppositional and marginal, even within hip hop. Contrary to most modern hip hop Grime has an up-tempo, industrial, machine-like, disharmonic ‘evil’ and dissonant sound, which distorts the smoothness central to most newer forms of hip hop, and which makes up a parallel to the noisy musical material of the classic rap group Public Enemy. The dissonant, disharmonic sound of grime, combined with the visual characteristic of the concrete suburbs depicted in the video confronts and disrupts normality, consensus and middleclass whiteness, thereby constituting a form of latent or implicit street politics.

Summing up the musical material analyzed in this cluster all articulate either implicit or explicit social criticism of the circumstances of life in the underprivileged suburbs. There is however also quite a bit of masculinism and misogyny present, for instance one song by B.O.C. is entitled *fissehul* – a derogatory slang word for vagina. This term is used to articulate disrespect towards other rappers (See Jensen 2005, 2010a for discussion of the gendered articulation in Pimp-A-Lot and P4L). The observation of misogyny among these groups is important, because misogyny and masculinism in hip hop lyrics has often been explained as a consequence of the commodification of hip hop (Armstrong 2001, Weitzer & Kubrin 2009). However these groups operate largely outside the commodity circuits, or did so when they created their most misogynist lyrics. These examples therefore points to another understand of the misogyny, i.e. as a dimension of claiming a masculinist position as a dangerous young black man in the face of structural marginality. The embracement of the position of the dangerous and criminal ‘perker’ can be interpreted as a strategy for accruing local value in the face of social marginalization. In a fashion, not very far from the processes the CCCS conceptualized as bricolage, the ‘sign’ of the dangerous black man is appropriated and imbued with value (Sandberg 2005).

In terms of the question of postmodernity raised above all groups discussed here are in a broad sense postmodern, due to their use of intertextuality as well as their musical practice which breaks with the idea of originality. Pimp-A-Lot even on their first CD raps over a number of instrumentals of known rap artist thereby disrupting any notion of original and copy – a practice which they refer to as ‘jacked’ tracks <sup>20</sup> on the back of their cover. However they are not postmodern in their articulations of identity. Nothing in the way these groups portray themselves implies a decentred understanding of identity. On the contrary Abu-Malek, producer and anchor man of Pimp-A-Lot, in

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<sup>20</sup> To jack is hip hop slang of robbing.

an interview for my PhD project explains that it is important to him that the rappers in his crew do not pretend to be something they are not!

### *Rappers as (modern) black intellectuals*

The hip hop artists in this cluster articulate a somewhat different form of hip hop style than the ‘dangerous’ young man. They appear to be well formulated, peaceful, progressive young men, educated – if not formally then on the street. In this cluster I include Zaki, Outlandish, late Marwan, late Artaf Kwawaja and Ali Kazim.

On example of these is the Danish-Egyptian rapper Zaki. In 2002 Zaki released his debut CD ‘Zakis musikmosaik’, and the best known song from the CD is probably ‘tragisk’. In this song he raps:

*You never wanted to house me/ you don't need folks like me*

*[...]*

*When you see my colour you think the problem is in my genes*

*I'm constantly told I'm just a problem*

*In Denmark all people have the right to think what they think*

*Except us, because we are muslims.*

The antiracist and social criticism in the text is articulated from a position which can best be described as a modernist intellectual, i.e. someone who is rational, progressive and willing and able to explain his cause. In that sense Zaki and the other artist in this cluster draw upon a tradition of rappers appearing as black intellectuals. Historically rappers as KRS-one, X-clan, Paris, early Intelligent Hoodlum, Chuck D, Talib Kveli and many others have taken up this position. It can be argued that these rappers have been part of a wider historical tradition containing black intellectuals as Frantz Fanon, W. E. B. Du Bois and Malcolm X.

Contrary to the musical material of the ‘dangerous young men’ the texts of the rappers in this cluster don’t contain sexism or misogyny<sup>21</sup>. On the contrary they sometimes appear as pro-feminist. For instance Artif Khawaja song *Butterfly* (in Danish: sommerfugl), addresses gendered violence

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<sup>21</sup> It can be argued that the position of the steadfast and militant black intellectual is also a masculinist position. This discussion falls outside the scope of the paper (for a nuanced discussion see Hughey 2009)

the blow hits her cheek paralyses her mind  
cause she never though he would hit her again  
[...]  
she collects the fragments from the mug  
he smashed on the way out of this house build on blues  
she sees the question marks in her boys eyes  
will she tell him the truth or fill him with lies  
she does the last, 'cause it is far the easiest  
convinced that the boy will forget it  
but in vain 'cause her face is way to swollen....

In the last verse of the song Artif depicts the main character as a strong woman who manages to break out of the violent relationship. He then adds 'I am he first-born. She is my mother'. Summing up the rappers in this cluster appear as progressive and rational anti racists and do not articulate misogyny. There is however nothing to suggest a decentred understanding of identity. Due to the absence of attempts to destabilize 'identity', I argue that they can on this particular dimension be understood as modernist. They are off course at the same time postmodern to the extent that all hip hop and perhaps all black bricolage culture can be considered postmodern.

#### *Postmodern identity play and left radicalism*

This cluster includes Albertslund Terrorkorps with a particular focus on DJ, producer and remixer Kid Kishore. The name Albertslund Terrorkorps in itself carries ambiguous meaning. Albertslund is a underprivileged suburban area in the periphery of Copenhagen widely known for being a lower working class area and for its high proportion of ethnic minorities. The term Terrorkorps may be an mocking parody of contemporary discourses about ethnic minority young men as potential terrorists, but it could also be an intertextual reference to New York rap crew Terror Squad led by famous rapper Fat Joe.

As a remixer and producer Kid Kishore does not limit himself to the hip hop genre in the narrow sense. His music to a very high degree takes the form of a postmodern bricolage of genres and styles, which are then remixed, recombined and distorted. Illustrative of this is his usage of genres as different as Indian bhangra and Bollywood, Danish hip hop, and Popular Danish pop singers like Kim Larsen, John Mogensen and Nik & Jay. While such a bricolage itself can be seen as a

postmodern musical practice that disrupts ethnic absolutism (Walcott 1999/ need maybe Gilroy reference?), the very content of the music itself is also often political. One example is Kid Kishores remix of the famous Danish RnB duo Nik & Jay's hit entitled 'Hot'. Kid Kishore distorts and remixes this well known hit song and gives it a new title *Dannebro er hot* - but he also changes the context by inserting and exchanging words<sup>22</sup>. The line 'burning gas on HC Andersens Boulevard' (Danish: brænder benzin af på HC Andersens Boulevard) is changed to 'burning Dannebrog<sup>23</sup> on HC Andersens Boulevard' (Danish: brænder Dannebrog på HC Andersens Boulevard). The content of the song is hereby changed from a celebration of car consumerism to a comment on the small scale rioting which has taken place in Copenhagen several times in connection to the so-called Cartoon Crisis. Kid Kishore similarly plays around with popular Danish 1970 singer John Mogensen's *Danish turf for the Danish* (in Danish: Danmarks jord for de danske (1972)) – originally a left wing anti EU protest song. In Kid Kishores hip hop mashup version which is accompanied by a psychedelic animated video the song becomes an ironic comment to contemporary anti-immigrant discourses in Denmark<sup>24</sup>.

Kid Kishore has a direct relation to perkerrap including P4L, Marwan and Pimp-A-Lot which were mentioned above. A considerable proportion of his music consists of remixed versions of perkerrap songs. One modification is however central to the analysis in this paper: sexist, homophobic and racist terms, including the term perker, are consequently cut out and replaced by distorted techno sounds. It should however be mentioned that I do not consider Kid Kishore as preoccupied with distancing himself from Perkerrap groups. On the contrary they are mutually present on each others friends list on social network internet sites. At the same time there is an explicit connection to the slang developed in multicultural street milieus – sometimes referred to as 'perkerdansk' when Kid Kishore names his small independent record company '*Sick enough records*' (in Danish 'syg nok records')<sup>25</sup>.

As the artists analysed above Kid Kishore comments on and questions Danish anti-immigrant discourses musically. For instance he started a performance on Danish Public Service TV by proclaiming that '*this one goes out to the ones who decide for themselves how they want to be*

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<sup>22</sup> <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2OhSXj-hiMI>

<sup>23</sup> The Danish flag.

<sup>24</sup> <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hAu2li6jbTs>

<sup>25</sup> To say something is sick enough /sygt nok is a positive statement.

*integrated*<sup>26</sup>. The political project is however not limited to antiracism. Kid Kishore also actively advocates feminism/antisexism, antihomophobia/queer, and anticapitalism, just as he played a role in the formation of the organization P4U - *Perkere for Ungdomshuset*<sup>27</sup> (note how the acronym style paraphrases P4L). He also appeared at a concert in support of controversial Muslim female candidate for the Danish parliament election, Asmaa Abdol-Hamid, who ran for parliament for Enhedslisten, the most left wing party with political representation in Denmark. The concert took place at a Queer bar in Copenhagen. Besides this he has also appeared at several demonstrations in the radical left milieu.

Kid Kishore musical practice can be characterized as postmodern. However he also articulates a postmodern position on other dimensions. In general his public appearances are characterized by identity play. He is often depicted in police uniform and has even appeared on television wearing a police shirt. At one point in time he took on the name 'Trentemøller' – and created a profile under that name on the social internet site Myspace. That was an example *par excellence* of a postmodern subversion of stable and authentic identity, since there was at the same time a highly popular ethnic Danish DJ by the name of *Anders Trentemøller*. Kid Kishore later commented that he specifically called himself Trentemøller and not *Anders Trentemøller*, and added that the use of this name was not a joke<sup>28</sup>. Another postmodern trait is the usage of a large number of pseudonyms: Trentemøller and Kid Kishore is not the two only names adopted by the biological person behind Kid Kishore. He also has several other names, including DJ Hvad (DJ What) and to this day it is unclear to most members of the public, how many of the members of Albertslund Terrorkorps which are actually the same biological person. On this dimension Kid Kishore breaks with the idea of a real and authentic true identity which otherwise prevails in hip hop.

To sum up Kid Kishore as an artist is postmodern on several dimensions, including the use of bricolage. Importantly he is the only artist analysed in this paper who articulates a postmodern understanding of identity as his public performances are to a very high degree characterized by identity play. Important to the discussions raised in this paper he illustrates that postmodern identity play and political substance are not mutually exclusive.

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<sup>26</sup> In Danish 'Den her går ud til dem, der selv bestemmer hvordan de vil integrere sig'. DR 2, Den 11. time, *date needed*

<sup>27</sup> Ungdomshuset was a culture house in Copenhagen primarily used by radical left wing youth

<sup>28</sup> In interview on DR 2, Den 11. time, *date needed*

## Discussion

The analysis above shows that the analyzed groups vary to a very high degree in terms of style and in terms of dimension of modernity/postmodernity. The groups in the first cluster stage themselves as almost stereotypical 'dangerous' black men, the groups in position two articulate social criticism from the position of the black intellectual. All these groups however display a quite modern understanding of identity. On the contrary the identity play of the groups in position 3 can be interpreted as an example of postmodern decentering of identity. While all hip hop can in a certain sense be characterized as postmodern due to its reliance of sampling and bricolage, only some of the groups addressed above articulate a postmodern understanding of identity. Put short hip hop can have both modern and postmodern traits. This observation illustrates that the messiness of the social world can often not be grasped adequately by such grand concepts as modernity and postmodernity. In fact it seems quite problematic to think of modernity and postmodernity (or late modernity or liquid modernity) as clear cut historical phases which replace each other. Instead we might think of the contemporary world as one where modernity, postmodernity and tradition exist side by side – sometimes perhaps even intertwined and overlapping (cf. Hall 1986). Nevertheless, regardless of whether or not the musical material includes a postmodern articulation of identity *all* three positions articulate political resistance.

The analysis calls for a number of discussions. *Firstly* as the model might appear as a set of neatly distinct mutually exclusive types it should be mentioned that there are overlaps and movement within the model: Marwan has shifted from position one to position from his first to his last album. Artif Khawaja was at one point a member of the group Kidnap celebrating drugs and violence in a style close to gangsterrap. And Kid Kishore belongs to the third position but borrows much of his musical material from the first position (but interestingly nothing from the second). *Secondly* the analysis suggests that structural forms of inequality are still relevant to understanding youth subcultures. Anti-immigrant discourses are being commented upon, critisized and answered in a wide variety of ways in the musical material. This suggest that the Post-Subcultural Studies scholars were perhaps premature in their discarding of CCCSs understanding that youth subcultures may sometimes be understood as collective answers to a shared social situation. Interestingly class is never mentioned directly in the musical material analyzed, although the young men producing the music are affected by simultaneous classed and ethnic marginality. The absence of class in the texts may be explained by the fact that class is generally rarely made a topic in Denmark (reference needed.). Another explanation of the absence of reference to class may be that hip hop offers a

discursive repertoire more well suited for commenting of racism, or that racism and ethnicism is simply experienced as more important than class by the young men. *Thirdly* the analysis points to the relevance of gender to contemporary discussions of subculture. All the artists mentioned above are *men*, mirroring the troublesome question of whether the hybridity and bricolage often celebrated in analyses of 'new ethnicities' (Hall 1992) and postmodernity are in fact more accessible to young men than to young women (Prieur 2007: 45, 2002). There *are* young women in this field: The Danish rapper Lucy Love is a widely respected rapper within the grime genre. The late Danish-Sudanese rapper and singer Natajsa was a widely popular example of hip hop as social criticism with explicit left wing and antiracist sympathies. Also the duo Faggot Fairys should be mentioned, especially their hit 'feed the horse' explicitly promoting lesbianism and queer politics. However female musicians do make up a relatively small minority among ethnic minority hip hop artists in Denmark. Gender is also relevant to a discussion of misogyny and masculinism in hip hop. As illustrated above especially position one of the typology routinely articulates sexism. There are different assessments of misogyny in hip hop. Some pro-feminist scholars emphasizes the problematic gender politics of hip hop (Crenshaw 1991, McDowell 1997, Armstrong 2001, Cole & Guy-Sheftall 2003, Weitzer & Kubrin 2009.) while other - not necessarily anti feminist - scholars considers it less of a problem (Hooks 1994a,b McLaren 1999, Walcott 1999, Baxter & Marina 2008: 111, Møller 2009). Here I will limit the discussion to pointing out that it is sometimes possible to distinguish between style and praxis (Baxter & Marina 2008, Jensen 2010a). Therefore masculinist texts are neither prescriptions nor descriptions of concrete sexist practises and may not be read as such. Here it should also be emphasized that many of the hip hop artist analyzed here operate or operated largely outside the commodity circuits of the music industry. Therefore their misogyny cannot be explained as a consequence of commodification (vs. Armstrong 2001, Weitzer & Kubrin 2009). On the contrary the misogyny can be thought of as a dimension of constructing a public image as a dangerous young black man. *Fourthly* the analysis in this paper seriously questions the claim that contemporary postmodern youth cultures do not have political aspects. The artists analyzed can be said to be postmodern on different dimensions. They are all postmodern to the extent that hip hop is itself a postmodern form, and some are also postmodern in their articulations of identity. However even Kid Kishore, an artist whose public performances often takes the form of identity play, is explicitly political. This questions the idea of depoliticized youth cultures as well as the more general idea that postmodernity implies de-politization (Hall 1985). In the words of Carrington & Wilson the conception of post-modernity employed by many post-

subcultural studies writers is too narrow, because ‘politics, if it remains at all, is shorn of its emancipatory potential’ (2004: 74).

With a terminology borrowed from Peter McLaren hip hop and rap, including gangsta rap, can be considered ‘*an oppositional political practice*’ (1999: 23, also Baxter & Marina 2008, Sernhede 2002, Jensen 2005, 2007). This point should not be confused with arguing that hip hop is an *unproblematic* political practice because, as the analysis above shows and as McLaren also points out, the resistance articulated in hip hop is sometimes intertwined with misogyny (McLaren 1999, 44). Hip hop is political, but not only in a counter hegemonic sense. There is also an aspect of reproduction at play. Perhaps it can even be argued that hip hop often performs a radicalization of patriarchy. This implies that hip hop should not be celebrated as resistance. This is true not only in terms of gender politics, but also in the sense that some subgenres of hip hop could be argued to rely too narrowly on the stereotype of the dangerous young black man (Jensen 2010a). However the imperfections of the resistant articulations in hip hop in general – and in the musical material analyzed above – does not make it any less political. Imperfect politics are not non-politics.

### **Conclusion and theoretical perspectives**

The analysis in this paper questions post-subcultural theory’s claims about youth culture on two dimensions: 1) It demonstrates that the production of hip hop among ethnic minority men in contemporary Denmark can only be understood if the analysis is informed by, and contextualized in, overall social structures – in particular race, ethnicity, gender and class. It thus questions the idea that structural forms of inequality have relatively little relevance to the study of contemporary youth subcultures. In other words the decoupling of the cultural and the structural within Post-Subcultural Studies is problematic. 2) It demonstrates that hip hop among ethnic minority men in contemporary Denmark has explicit and implicit political dimensions. This is true whether or not the musical material of the groups is postmodern in a broad sense (which all hip hop is) or in a narrow sense (involving identity play). This observation questions the idea that we live in a time where the cultural articulations of young people are postmodern and therefore depoliticized: To the extent the musical material analysed here are public manifestations of a larger subculture the analysis illustrates that post-subcultural theory is inadequate for understanding substantial trends in contemporary youth culture. This does not mean that all contemporary youth subcultures are all about politics, nor does it mean that the wider subculture of ethnic minority young men from whom these hip hop groups stem is political all the time. But it does question the grand claims by Post-



Subcultural Studies scholars that youth subcultures of the present are generally depoliticized. However the analysis also supports the critique of class reductionism often raised against the CCCS, as it illustrates the centrality of gender and ethnicity.

This conclusion raises further theoretical perspectives. It thus points to the continued relevance - or the reconstruction of - what I call a 'neo-birminghamian' notion of subculture (Jensen 2010b). Such an understanding maintains an empirical openness towards political dimensions of contemporary youth subcultures. It also insists that analysis of youth subcultures should always be contextualized in terms of power and structural forms of inequality. However it breaks with the class reductionism inherent in the CCCS theory in favour of a more sensitive analysis of the interplay of class, gender, ethnicity and 'race' (Carrington & Wilson 2004). For that purpose such a theory would in my point of view gain from being informed by what has become known as the intersectionality perspective in feminist scholarship. This perspective argues that social categories such as class, gender, ethnicity and 'race' are not separate and discrete and should be analyzed as mutually constitutive (Crenshaw 1991, Staunæs 2003, McCall 2005).

*The core of a neobirminghamian understanding would be that subcultures are sometimes still about a collective 'answering' of shared situations – but also that these situations are not reducible to class.*

It is obvious that such a neobirminghamian notion of subculture should not monopolize the field of subcultural or youth studies. As Greener & Hollands (2006) and Hodgkinson (2004) remind us no single theory fits for the understanding all contemporary youth cultures and sometimes a combination of theoretical elements is relevant. However at this moment in time such a theory seems to be missing.

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